



Dying to Get In: Digging Up U.S. Cemetery Records

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OBJECTIVES

- Summarize the history and background of cemeteries and cemetery records in the United States
- Describe the genealogical value of cemetery records
- Review methods of finding cemetery records online
- Show how to use cemetery records in your research
- Present a case study using cemetery and related records

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

MAIN TYPES OF CEMETERIES

Church cemeteries or graveyards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• On church property• Governed by church leaders• Religious sanctuary
Family cemeteries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Private property• Served one or a few related families• Sheltered area
City cemeteries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public property• Great variety• Many unrelated people from various backgrounds
Military cemeteries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Post Cemeteries<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Those who died in a particular battle or war• Often disinterred from original burial place and reburied there• National Cemeteries<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Federally operated• Veterans, military personnel, spouses, minor children
Memorial parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Private commercial business property• Non-denominational• Open areas, trails, benches• Flat headstones

BASIC VOCABULARY

Types of burial sites

Grave	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Underground• Typically holds a casket or coffin
Crypt	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Underground, usually under a church• Room to hold remains of the deceased
Mausoleum	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Above-ground building to house remains• May include a chapel
Tomb	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enclosure for remains• Above or below ground
Vault	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Metal or concrete enclosure• Inside grave to protect casket
Drawer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Above ground• Inside wall or mausoleum
Columbarium	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Above ground• Wall with spaces for urns and cremated remains

GENEALOGICAL VALUE

Types of cemetery records and information they may contain

Monuments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Headstone – at head of grave, with inscription• Footstone – at foot of grave, some have short inscriptions• Cairn – distinctive pile of rocks to mark a place• Megalith – large rock to mark a place• Ledger – large flat stone covering entire burial plot• Box – above-ground coffin, usually stone• Cenotaph – memorial for those buried elsewhere
Applications for military headstones	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Name• Service information• Birth and death dates• Religion• Cemetery• Applicant (usually a family member) information and signature
Interment cards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Name• Birth and death dates• Location of grave• Funeral director• Place of birth• Marital status• Source of information

Burial ledgers or cemetery books	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name • Age • Race • Date and place of burial • Undertaker • Permit number • Burial costs • Cause of death • Date and place of birth • Parents' names • Other information
Deeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of burial plot • Location of plot • Date of purchase • Transfers of plot ownership after first purchase
Permits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cemetery name • Date of permit • Name of person to be buried • Location of grave • Other details
Record of funerals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of deceased • Dated of funeral • Date and place of birth • Parents' names and places of birth • Funeral and burial costs • Residence • Clergyman • Physician • Location of burial plot • Date, time, and location of funeral

Other pertinent record types

Obituaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newspaper articles giving details about deceased persons and their families
Death certificates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name • Death date and place • Cause of death • Attending physician • Length of last illness or time of last injury • Date and place of birth • Occupation • Parents' names and places of birth • Informant's name and address • Cemetery name and location • Funeral home or undertaker
Census records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Household members • Residence • Approximate age • Occupation • Education • Immigration and naturalization • Number of children • Parents' birthplaces • Other information
Marriage records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of bride and groom • Marriage date and place • Age of bride and groom • Residence of bride and groom • Parents of bride and groom • Occupations of bride and groom • Number of marriage for each party • Officiator • Witnesses

FINDING CEMETERY RECORDS

- **FindAGrave.com** | <https://findagrave.com>
 - Photographs of headstones
 - Organized by cemetery
 - Searchable by name or cemetery
 - User-submitted memorials
- **BillionGraves.com** | <https://billiongraves.com>
 - Photographs of headstones
 - GPS Coordinates of gravesites
 - Nearby graves
 - Searchable by name or cemetery
- **Interment.net** | <https://interment.net>
 - Transcriptions of headstones from around the world
 - Burial records from government agencies, churches, genealogical, and historical groups
 - Submissions are not editable except by submitter

- **NamesInStone.com** | <https://namesinstone.com>
 - Cemetery records
 - Interactive maps
 - Searchable by name
- **Ancestry.com** | <https://ancestry.com>
 - Hundreds of collections of cemetery and related records
 - Search “Card Catalog” for “U.S.” and “Cemetery”
 - Death registers, death certificates, wills and probate records, obituaries, cemetery records, etc.
- **FamilySearch.org** | <https://familysearch.org>
 - FamilySearch Research Wiki
 - Select “Cemeteries” for record type under name of city, county, and state
 - Select cemetery records under “Online Resources”
 - FamilySearch Catalog
 - Search under name of city, county, and state with keyword, “Cemetery”
 - Try other keywords like funeral, death, burial, and obituary

USING CEMETERY RECORDS

- Identify the name of the cemetery where your ancestor was buried
- Discover where the cemetery is/was located
- Find cemetery records
- Visit the cemetery, if possible, to extract more evidence
- Compile evidence from *all* extant cemetery and death records for time and place
- Compare evidence to that in other pertinent records
- Reconcile conflicting data

QUESTIONS?

For one-on-one help with your research problem, schedule a FREE 20-minute Virtual Genealogy Consultation at <https://www.familysearch.org/en/library/research-help>